



Christie Administration Continues to Expand School Options for Students Across the State with the Approval of 8 New Charter Schools

For Immediate Release

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Trenton, NJ – Continuing the Christie Administration’s commitment to expanding the number of school options for high-need students across the state, the Department of Education today announced the approval of 8 charter applications eligible to open in September 2012. These eight options will help to ensure that every student in New Jersey, regardless of zip code, has a high-quality school option available to them. Along with 25 charter applications approved in previous rounds, these approvals bring the total number of charter schools eligible to open in September to 33, pending approval during the Department’s readiness review.

“Since Governor Christie took office, we have committed to being unapologetically impatient when students do not have access to the high-quality school options that they deserve. In addition to working to improve all public schools by ensuring that every classroom has an outstanding educator and implementing the new Common Core State Standards aligned with college and career readiness, we are also committed to expanding the number of high-quality charter schools so that every student can choose the school option that is the best fit for them,” said Acting Commissioner Chris Cerf. “The applications we approved today have demonstrated a strong educational program and the capacity to implement that program, in addition to articulating a clearly defined need for the school in their specific community.”

Over the past year, the Department of Education has worked closely with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to strengthen both the state’s application review process and overall authorizing capacity. The Department has a three stage charter review process. Using both internal DOE staff and qualified external reviewers, each application is reviewed against a defined set of benchmarks to determine which applications will move on to the second stage of the process. As one example, benchmarks include whether an application proposes an educational program that integrates the school’s mission and clearly indicates how it will educate all students, regardless of any theme or other specific focus.

Typically, about half of the applications move on to the second round of the process. In this round, 17 of 42 applications moved onto the second stage of the process where applicants receive “addenda” questions for clarification on their application. The Department provides both the original application and “addenda” to districts for comment. The Department also receives and reviews significant public comment during this process.

In the third part of the process, the Department brings each team in for an intensive, in-person interview where applicants are asked about both the academic and operational components of the proposed school. In addition, the public and district comments received are incorporated into the interview questions. The review team also closely examines the school’s financial plan and budget. The Commissioner of Education then makes a final determination about which applications to approve. Approval decisions are made based on the quality of the proposed educational program, the capacity of the founding team to implement that program, and the need for the proposed school in the community.

In addition to the decisions today, Acting Commissioner Cerf repeated a call that he made in September in a letter to charter school leaders (<http://www.nj.gov/education/chartsch/090911letter.pdf>) that charters have clear and transparent enrollment and accountability processes.

“According to data over the past several years, charter schools on average across the state are outperforming other district options for students in high-need communities. However, we must also be honest that just as some district schools are failing students, some charter schools in New Jersey are also not performing at the level their students deserve,” said Acting Commissioner Cerf. “Charter schools are granted autonomy in exchange for accountability, and we will continue to hold all charter schools accountable for results as we did last year when we closed two struggling charter schools. In addition, charter schools must continue to focus on both quality of education and equality of opportunity. At the state level, we will continue to hold charters schools accountable to ensure that they offer all students a high-quality education. I applaud the effort of Newark charter schools in this area to step forward through a charter compact and commit to equal access both in terms of recruitment, selection, and retention.”

Earlier this week in his State of the State speech, Governor Christie urged the legislature to make much needed changes to the state’s charter school law through bill A-4167 introduced last June. Sweeping changes to New Jersey’s charter school laws are needed to remove barriers and roadblocks to the growth of high-quality charter

schools. The current laws and rules governing charter schools act as a deterrent to growth instead of fostering expansion. It is time to aggressively encourage some of the nation's most-respected and successful charter school operators to come to New Jersey while making it possible to implement the same model of innovation and results in other new and existing charter schools.

The list of approved charter applications is below. Each of these charters will need to be approved during the Department's readiness review before it is able to open in September.

Name	Districts	Grades served (at scale)	Enrollment (at scale)
Charter School for Global Leadership	Camden	9-12	600
City Invincible Charter School	Camden	K-8	600
COMPASS Academy Charter School	Millville, Pittsgrove, Vineland	K-5	228
Hope Community Charter School	Camden	K-4	330
Jersey City Global Charter School	Jersey City	K-6	486
Newark Prep Charter School	Newark	6-12	446
Paulo Freire Charter School	Newark	9-12	320
Trenton Prep Charter School	Trenton	6-12	446

In addition, below is a list of the external reviewer that supported the Department by reviewing applications in the current round. These reviewers bring a range of experiences to the review process to ensure diverse voices are heard in the process. These reviewers include charter leaders, current and former educators, and operational experts, among others. These external reviewers read applications and participated in initial review conversations with the Charter Schools Office. However, they did not participate in the interview process or in formulating recommendations to the Commissioner, which were handled solely by Department staff.

External reviewers
Sulafa Bashir
Natasha Campbell
Elena Day
Barbara Greene
Radhika Parithivel
Amy Pozmantier
Ray Regimbal